

Some Memories of Friends and Strange Writing

I have known Alby Stone for an indeterminate amount of time somewhere between 43 and 52 years.

Alby is a writer with a long list of published books to his name. In the closing decades of the Twentieth Century he was writing about mythology, ley lines and symbols within the context of North European paganism. In the Twenty-First Century he has turned his talents to fiction writing and the result is, if I have counted them correctly, 28 novels, 3 collections of short stories and a few other pieces appearing in anthologies.

These stories are STRANGE. Alby's contribution to the history of weird fiction is prodigious. My earliest recollection of the man are from somewhere in the early 1970s hearing his name mentioned by my friend Jim Baggins and Jim's old neo-Teddyboy chum "Tank".

I was on the cusp of 19 and 20 years and was slightly obsessed with being a wizard. I had a comedy persona as a foolish and clumsy wizard character and Jim Baggins had christened me with the nickname "Wiz". I was happy to allow everyone to call me Wiz. Jim and I were writing an absolute train wreck of a novel in which we appeared as comedy fictionalised versions of ourselves called "Wiz and Jim". Jim mentioned that, amongst his various mates from Southend-on-Sea, he knew another wizardy character called Alby. I don't recall ever meeting Alby in those days but Alby says we met in 1972 at the Assembly Rooms, Glastonbury.

I don't remember that, possibly because, in that initial squat of the Assembly Rooms, Jim's brother John had given me a half-tablet of acid and that was a brand new experience for me, having previously been a non-smoking, non-drinking, non-tripping newbie on the Glastonbury scene.

In 1974, when I moved to London, I was having housing and job related problems. I didn't have a house or a job. Which was a problem. Orman, a hypnotist-guru from the Emin Society, told me to go and live at my mum's house in Surrey and, being hypnotised, I had no choice but to obey.

Then my two-times ex-girlfriend Sandy teamed up with Jim's chum "Tank" and they rented a house for three on the assumption that I would agree to join them as the third housemate. When they finally got around to telling me about this arrangement they presented it as a fait accompli and clearly expected me to just pack a bag and leave my mum's house to live with them in North London. I refused, partly because I had no money to pay the rent and no job by which to get some money and partly because of the way they had just assumed that I would agree without having been previously consulted.

They seemed stunned and angry at my refusal. I think they hadn't even considered that I was a separate human being who needed to be told in advance about any plan which was going to involve me.

So they went their way and I went mine but I still saw Sandy occasionally at Emin meetings. There seemed to be no hard feelings.

I visited them at their new house and "Tank" told me that someone called Alby was going to be taking "my place" in the house. I reminded him that it wasn't "my place" because I had never agreed to it. Tank replied with the following words "Well, the Wiz is dead - Long Live the Wiz!!! The Wizard Alby Stone!!"

My only response was "Huh? Charming....."

For the next few years I was being very deeply brainwashed (as I've described in other chapters). During those years of deep hypnosis and indoctrination my only recollection about Alby was those words of Tank's "The Wiz is dead! Long live the Wiz!"

I occasionally wondered who this Alby Stone character was and whether he was a comedy wizard like me or a real occultist.

When I eventually got away from the Emin's hypnotic influence and reclaimed my life as my own I re-established contact with my old friend Jim Baggins and he introduced me to Alby. At long last I found out what this fellow wizard was like.

Turned out he was one of the nicest people you could hope to meet. We became friends and, when I was living in Clapham, South London, Alby was living nearby and I went over to visit him frequently. During the next few years Alby lived in various bits of South London. He was at Brockley, New Cross Gate, Greenwich and Lewisham (I think) at various times and still lives in South London to this day. I moved from Clapham back to the mystic hills of Avalon/Glastonbury and lived there for several years. Alby wrote books about the landscape and magical history. Some of his books in those years, published by Heart of Albion Press, included "Explore Shamanism", "Ymir's Flesh: North European Creation Mythologies", "Wyrd – Fate and destiny in Northern European paganism", "A Splendid Pillar – Images of the axis mundi in the Grail Romances", "The Bleeding Lance – Myth, ritual and the Grail legend", "The Questing Beast and Other Cosmic Dismemberments", "Straight Track Crooked Road – Leys, spirit paths and shamanism".

In more recent years Alby has begun writing weird fiction. Using his knowledge and skill from the experience of writing his earlier, more fact based, studies of strange history Alby has crafted a series of novels and some short stories which permit us to visit his dreamscape of the bizarre and the mysterious.

Alby has been a good friend to me for many years. Helping me through times of financial hardship and times of being arrested in protest marches and other trouble situations I've run into over the past few decades.

He's influenced my choices of music, made me aware of The Pogues and Tom Waits back in the 80s when they were both new names within the world of all cool music. He introduced

me to the quirkiness of Scott Walker's interpretation of the songs of Jacques Brel and made me aware of the importance of New Order.

Alby Stone is a wizard and a man of taste and integrity.
Waterstones have this little page about Alby's writings at:
<https://www.waterstones.com/author/alby-stone/1852618>

but the place to find all the novels and short story collections is at Amazon Kindle.
The night Jim Baggins died I was at home in my flat in Exeter. Jim was in Dorchester.

Around the time that he died I had a chip-pan fire in my kitchen and the flat was so filled with smoke that I had to call the fire brigade to come and extract it all to make the air in the flat breathable again. I later found out that all the time that I had been coping with that fire and smoke, Jim was dying. I always think that the fire in my flat was somehow connected across miles and miles of distance to Jim's death in Dorchester. I had never had a serious fire before and it seemed as if Jim's death had somehow been some sort of psychic shockwave "disturbance in the ether" sort of thing but I'm aware that I'm probably talking bollocks.

When Jim died Alby informed me of the arrangements for the funeral and I was there along with Alby and his partner Alex and Jim's old chum Tank. There was going to be a bit of a wake for Jim after the ceremony at the crematorium but I ran away from it. I just couldn't stand the idea of sipping drinks with a crowd of people Jim had known. Jim had meant too much to me to willingly walk into a middle-class wine and cheese sort of ending. I literally ran away from the gathering of people, ran down the road to get away from the whole situation.